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SUSSAN BABAIE and TALIN GRIGOR (eds.):

Persian Kingship and Architecture: Strategies of Power in Iran from the Achaemenids to the Pahlavis.

260 pp. London / New York: I.B.Tauris, 2015. £60. ISBN 978 1 84885 751 3

Following a brief summary introduction this ambitious and interdisciplinary edited volume, consisting of six chapters, starts with Margaret Cool Root's study of the performative porticos of Persepolis. While offering an overview of imperial Achaemenid architecture, the chapter focuses on the Apadana at Persepolis. The author proposes several new and thought-provoking interpretations of the role and function of the site, at the risk of appearing a little too certain of some of the more speculative assertions. She convincingly sweeps away several earlier misconceptions as to the isolation of the city, demonstrating the regular presence of the king and court. The structure is explained clearly, and cultic and royal ritual uses of it are examined. While there are occasional lapses into jargon-heavy academese, this insight into a key monument of early Persian kingship provides a fitting beginning for a volume that spans the *longue durée*.

The second chapter, by Matthew P. Canepa, segues smoothly from the first chapter in a way many edited volumes aspire, but few achieve. This wide ranging and clearly written study addresses post-Hellenic dynastic sanctuaries, drawing on archaeological, sculptural and numismatic evidence. Beginning with the earliest Arsacid site, at Nisa in Turkmenistan, the discussion moves to the impact of Arsacid rule on dynastic sites in Armenia, before returning east to the developments in Bactria and India under the Kushans. Using the sites at Surkh-Kotil in Afghanistan and Mat in India as case studies, the process of blending Hellenic and Iranian elements with the Indian cultural tradition is elucidated. This is followed by an examination of the changes that came about with the rise of the iconoclastic Sassanian dynasty in the third century CE, and their increased focus on the ritual use of fire. The author concludes by demonstrating the long and diverse traditions upon which the Islamic rulers of Iran would subsequently draw upon.

In the first of two chapters spanning the period before and after the rise of Islam, the late Lionel Bier examines the relationship between Sasanian palaces and the development of early Islamic architecture. The author, in what was originally published as an article in 1993, begins by demonstrating the problems with the published record of the known Sasanian sites, especially at Kish and Bishapur. Moving on to the Islamic-era sites, he notes the presence of imagery at Khirbat al-Mafjar in Jericho which draws on Sasanian royal sources, but argues that all the archaeological evidence for continuity of form and function is equivocal at best. Citing the palace complex in the Amman citadel, with its allusions to Ctesiphon, he suggests that there are fewer affinities with Sasanian architecture than might be expected. Bier argues that it is very likely that Umayyad and Abbasid audience ensembles were derived from Sassanian models, but concludes that there was not wholesale imitation of entire Sasanian palaces.

The volume moves into the study of Islamic architecture in Iran with a chapter by the late Melanie Michailidis. She examines the funerary architecture of the Bavandids of Tabaristan, whose rule spanned the period which saw the fall of the Sasanians and the coming of Islam. This longest ruling, if perhaps least known, Iranian dynasty built three towers in the Elborz Mountains. Following a much needed overview of the historical context, the author addresses

the three brick-built cylindrical structures; the Mil-e Radkan (1016-21), the tower at Lajim (1022-3), and the nearby (undated) tower at Resget, all of which feature inscriptions in both Arabic and Pahlavi. The key unifying characteristic, alongside form and media, is shown to be their remote, elevated locations, away from trade routes and sites of habitation. A study of the epigraphy provides evidence of the names of otherwise unrecorded rulers, followed by an account of Bavandid connections to the Sasanian past, and their funerary practices. While the assumption that the earlier Gonbad-e Qabus must have copied lost Bavandid structures is debatable, the elucidation of the difference between the dark and inaccessible Bavandid towers and later, in many cases more decorative, Saljuq tombs is noteworthy.

The penultimate chapter, by Sussan Babaie, moves the discussion forward to the period of Safavid rule. She addresses issues concerning the *maydan* as a royal performative space under Shah Abbas I, and explores connections to the ancient Iranian past of such practices, thus bringing the discussion full circle. The author demonstrates the underlying continuity in Persian kingship, if not necessarily the architectural aesthetic, across the ages. The chapter proceeds to examine three examples; Isfahan, the relatively unknown remains of Farahabad in Mazandaran, and Kerman in south-east Iran. Babaie concludes with a sophisticated analysis of the uses of imperial architecture and public spaces in Safavid Iran.

The final chapter, by Talinn Grigor, is a study of revivalism under the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The emphasis was increasingly on the pre-Islamic past, although the Qajars also relied heavily on the Safavid aesthetic. The reduction of Iran to a weak pawn of the European powers is argued to be at the heart of the trend towards the use of forms and decoration associated with the imperial glories of ancient Iran. The chapter concludes with an overview of the architecture of the secular and modernizing Pahlavis, who purged European and Islamic decorative elements, and oversaw the destruction of earlier hybrid Qajar-era buildings.

This book will be of interest to anyone seeking to place the use of architecture for imperial promotion in the Iranian world into a wider context, beyond the boundaries of any one specific period or dynasty. The editors and other contributors have succeeded in creating a coherent narrative of Persian kingship and architecture across the ages, and strike a blow to the outdated and artificial historiographic divisions often applied to the study of the architecture and history of Iran.

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